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SUBJECT: ISRAEL: 2009 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

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¶1. The following is Post's submission for the 2009 Country Report on Terrorism for Israel. Embassy Tel Aviv's point of contact for this report is: Jason Grubb, Political-Military Officer, Tel: 972-3-519-7460; e-mail: GrubbJB@State.gov.

¶2. Begin Text:

Israel

Four Israeli citizens were killed in three separate terrorist attacks during the year, down from 13 attacks in 2008 which resulted in 27 Israelis killed. Three Israeli non-combatants were killed in late December 2008 as a result of rocket attacks launched during the December 2008 - January 2009 conflict between Israel and Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip. Rocket and mortar fire emanating from the Gaza Strip was the Palestinian terrorist organizations' preferred form of attack. However, Israeli government officials believe Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip helped achieve a level of deterrence, as rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza dropped precipitously following the conflict. Israeli government officials welcomed this deterrence, but noted that Palestinian terrorist organizations have used this relatively quiet period to rearm and reorganize in preparation for any future conflict. There were no incidents of Palestinian suicide bombing.

In addition to Operation Cast Lead, Israel responded to the terrorist threat as it has in recent years, with targeted operations directed at terrorist leaders, terror infrastructure, and active terror activities such as rocket launching groups. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) and the Israel Security Service continued to conduct roundups and other military operations in the West Bank designed to increase pressure on Palestinian terrorist organizations and their supporters. Construction on an extensive security barrier in the West Bank and Jerusalem continued in some areas. Israeli officials believe the security barrier has played an important role in making terrorist attacks more difficult to undertake. In some areas in the West Bank, such as Jenin and around Nablus, Israeli authorities eased curfews and reduced incursions to mitigate effects on the local population while maintaining a strong counterterrorism presence. Overall, Israeli security services significantly relaxed movement and access measures in the West Bank.

Given the temporary drop in rocket/mortar fire and the absence of suicide bombing attacks, Israel security forces focused on a new trend in terrorist attacks dubbed "the lone terrorist." In this instance, terrorist attacks are carried out by individuals typically lacking criminal records that have not previously contacted or received support from terrorist organizations. These individuals are harder to identify and deter prior to committing their attacks.

Terrorist attacks that resulted in injuries and the Israeli responses included:

-- On March 5, a Palestinian driving a bulldozer rammed into a police car and a bus in Jerusalem, injuring two Israeli police officers. Israeli police and a taxi driver shot and killed the assailant.

-- On March 15, two police officers were killed in a shooting attack near Massua in the northern Jordan Valley. No suspects have been identified in the attack; the "Imad Mughniyeh Group" claimed responsibility.

-- On April 2, an axe-wielding Palestinian killed a 13-year old Israeli and seriously wounded a seven-year old Israeli in the West Bank settlement of Bat Ayin. The assailant was later arrested; Islamic Jihad and the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyeh both claimed responsibility for the attack.

-- On April 17, members of the Beit Hagai settlement emergency squad shot and killed a knife-wielding Palestinian that infiltrated the community.

-- On May 9, a 56-year old taxi driver was kidnapped and strangled to death by three Palestinians near Gan Yavne. The arrested assailants claimed they committed the murder as vengeance for the death of an Islamic Jihad operative killed by the IDF in 2007.

Throughout the year, Israel's security services were able to keep terrorist planners and operators off balance, reporting multiple foiled attempts:

-- On March 21, a 40-kilogram explosive device concealed in the trunk of a car parked in a lot outside a shopping mall in Haifa was activated but failed to detonate. Israel police defused the bomb; the previously unknown Galilee Free Brigades claimed responsibility.

-- On June 16, 10 terrorists from Gaza staged a failed assault at the Karni crossing. At least four terrorists and several horses loaded with explosives were killed in the ensuing firefight with the IDF. Video footage released by the Junud Ansar Allah ("Soldiers Loyal to Allah") cell following the attack detailed preparations for the attack.

-- On November 26, IDF reservists ordered an individual approaching the Israeli border from Egypt near Eilat to stop. The individual fled the scene after dropping his bag containing a 15 kilogram explosive device.

-- On December 9, Israel border guards arrested a Palestinian attempting to carry six pipe bombs through the Qalandiya checkpoint leading into Jerusalem from the West Bank.

Gaza Strip and Operation Cast Lead

Palestinian terrorist organizations were relatively unsuccessful in carrying out suicide bombings and other attacks within Israel during the past year. However, these organizations launched effective mortar and rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory for the past eight years. Israel security services assessed that the use of rockets and mortars reflected recognition by the groups launching them that their best chance for success lies through asymmetrical warfare, especially in light of the stringent physical security measures that limit the movement of potential suicide bombers into Green Line Israel. According to the MFA, Palestinian terrorists launched approximately 12,000 rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel between 2000 and 2008, including 3,000 rockets and mortars in 2008 alone.

The reliance on rockets reflected technological advancements allowing groups to manufacture rockets cheaply, stockpile them, and launch them greater distances. In addition, Iran

increased the provision of longer ranged rockets, which were disassembled and smuggled through tunnels into Gaza. In November, Israeli security officials reported that Hamas successfully test-fired a 60-kilometer range rocket, or able to reach the greater Tel Aviv area from northern Gaza. On December 16, Israeli officials reported that a Russian-made S5K rocket impacted in the vicinity of Sderot - the first time such a weapons system was fired from Gaza. As the rockets' ranges continue to increase, Israeli authorities in cities and communities surrounding Gaza have initiated emergency response training in anticipation of eventual rocket attacks.

The IDF initiated Operation Cast Lead on December 27, 2008, in response to the collapse of a six-month ceasefire and subsequent intensification of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza. The IAF launched airstrikes on Hamas security installations, personnel, and other facilities, as well as rocket and mortar launch teams, with the aim of stopping the rocket attacks and ceasing arms smuggling into Gaza. On January 3, Israeli forces launched a ground invasion. Hostilities between Israeli forces and Hamas operatives continued through January 18, and the Israeli withdrawal of troops was completed on January 21.

Three Israeli non-combatants died as a result of rocket and mortar fire during Cast Lead; according to the MFA and human rights organizations, 571 rockets and 205 mortars were fired into Israeli territory during the operation. In addition, the MFA reported 4 severely injured, 11 moderately wounded, and 167 lightly wounded Israelis - but did not differentiate between combatant and non-combatants. The MFA noted that 584 Israelis were treated for shock as a result of rocket/mortar fire during Cast Lead.

The number of Palestinian casualties during Operation Cast Lead was a subject of controversy. For example, Israeli human rights NGO B'Tselem reported the death of 1,021 non-combatants out of 1,387 total Palestinian casualties. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported 1,181 non-combatants out of 1,417 total Palestinian casualties. The Palestinian Ministry of Health, Gaza, estimated 1,440 total Palestinian casualties. The IDF reported the total number of Palestinian casualties at 1,166, with 709 combatant fatalities. The IDF explained the combatant casualty

discrepancy based on the belief that Hamas operatives removed their uniforms during the conflict, thereby making it difficult to identify combatants from non-combatants. The IDF also reported that it carefully verified the identities of most of the Palestinian combatants killed in the operation. International NGOs claimed that Israel forbade access to Gaza following the conflict, thus making any casualty count difficult. Finally, questions arose regarding the definition of "combatant," including whether Hamas policemen should be defined as such.

Subsequent to the large-scale hostilities, the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, authorized April 3 by the Human Rights Council (HRC), investigated possible violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law that might have been committed in the context of the Gaza military operations whether before, during, or after by Israel; the Palestinian Authority; Hamas; and armed Palestinian groups. On September 29, the mission's leader Judge Richard Goldstone presented to the HRC the final report of the mission, with which Israel refused to cooperate, arguing that the HRC's mandate was biased. The report, which was criticized for methodological failings, legal errors, falsehoods, and an anti-Israel bias, reflected the mission's belief that war crimes and possible crimes against humanity had been committed by Israelis and Palestinians. On October 16, the HRC endorsed the report and on November 4, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution urging Israel and Palestinians (both Hamas and Palestinian Authority) to investigate the allegations. Israeli officials condemned the report, noting that it serves to encourage terrorist organizations and "rewards acts of terror."

Since the end of Operation Cast Lead, the IDF estimated approximately 250 rockets, mortars shells, and Grad missiles have been fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip - an almost 90 percent decline in such attacks from 2008. Following such attacks, the IAF launched airstrikes targeting approximately 150 facilities, tunnels, and launch teams in Gaza. The IDF also estimated slightly less than 100 attacks by Palestinian terrorist organizations against the Gaza security fence; most of these incidents involved small arms shootings or attempts to place explosive devices along the fence. Israel government and security officials described this relative period of calm as misleading as Hamas rearmed and reorganized in preparation for the next round of conflict.

Northern Border and Hizballah

Israel's security establishment remained concerned about the terrorist threat posed to Israel in the north by Hizballah and its Iranian and Syrian backers. Israeli security officials argued that Iran - primarily through the efforts of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) - has established a sophisticated arms smuggling network from Iran through Syria into Iran's proxy Hizballah in Lebanon. Israeli security officials said Hizballah continued to provide support to select Palestinian groups to augment their capacity to conduct attacks against Israel.

Israeli politicians and security officials pointed to Hizballah's efforts to rebuild and re-arm following the 2006 Second Lebanon War as evidence that Hizballah remained a threat to Israel; these officials estimate that Hizballah currently possesses an arsenal of over 40,000 short- and medium-range rockets. Prime Minister Netanyahu said on several occasions that Israel will hold Lebanon accountable for any attack by Hizballah on Israel, and stated on December 12 that Israel views Hizballah as "the real Lebanese army."

Israeli officials continued to claim that Hizballah has moved arms south of the Litani River, and pointed to several incidents in support of this assertion:

-- On July 14, between 1,000 and 1,550 kilograms of explosives detonated in the Shiite village of Khirbit Salim. Hizballah blocked UNIFIL access to the scene, preventing further inspection.

-- On September 11, terrorists associated with the Global Jihad claimed responsibility for firing two Katyusha rockets from southern Lebanon into northern Israel near Nahariya.

-- On October 12, a large explosion took place in the house of a senior Hizballah member near the village of Tayr Filsay. Israel security officials claimed Hizballah used the house as an arms depot and provided unmanned aerial vehicle footage showing Hizballah operatives removing arms from the house.

-- On October 27, a Katyusha rocket was fired into northern Israel near Kirya Shmona. IDF forces responded by firing artillery shells at the source of the rocket attack.

With the exception of these rocket attacks and arms cache explosions, Israel's northern border remained relatively quiet during the course of the year. The IDF continued a strong exercise schedule and military presence in the Golan Heights. In April, Israeli media outlets reported widely that Egyptian security services foiled a Hizballah cell's plot to carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli tourists in Sinai.

Countersmuggling

The smuggling of commodities, arms, explosives, and funds in support of terrorist groups such as Hamas through tunnels along the Philadelphia Corridor between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, and Hizballah along smuggling routes in Lebanon, continued to prove problematic. Israeli authorities stated

that the continued smuggling of sophisticated, medium-range rocket systems able to strike Tel Aviv into Gaza increases the likelihood that Israel will conduct another operation similar to Operation Cast Lead. Israeli officials asserted that Egypt took steps to prevent arms smuggling from the Sinai into Gaza, but can do much more in terms of arresting, prosecuting and incarcerating smugglers, destroying tunnel infrastructure, and providing socio-economic alternatives for Bedouin involved in smuggling activities.

The IAF carried out regular airstrikes against smuggling tunnels along the Philadelphi Corridor. In March, Israel news media reported on an alleged Israeli airstrike against an arms smuggling convoy in Sudan destined for Gaza. On November 4, the Israel Naval Forces seized the M/V Francop, the largest arms shipment ever seized by Israeli authorities.

According to Israeli officials, the M/V Francop left Bandar-Abbas, Iran, bound for Latakia, Syria, carrying approximately 500 tons of arms - including mortar shells, Katyusha rockets, and 122-mm rockets - allegedly destined for Hizballah.

Jewish Terrorism

A high-profile case raised awareness regarding settler violence and acts of terrorism. Israeli security services arrested American-born settler Yaacov "Jack" Teitel on October 7 in connection with a number of crimes and terrorist attacks over the past 12 years. Teitel was arrested for posting anti-homosexual flyers, and later confessed to a number of crimes, including the murder of two Palestinians in 1997. He also claimed responsibility for several attempted bombings, including against Israel police assets, sending a parcel bomb to a Messianic Jewish family in Ariel in which a 15-year old Israeli-American boy was injured, and placing a pipe-bomb that injured Israel Prize laureate and peace activist Prof. Zeev Sternhall in September 2008.

While Israeli officials praised the Israeli security services' arrest and investigation of Teitel, Israeli media outlets questioned whether the security services are sufficiently motivated or resourced to conduct investigations on Jewish terrorists. Israel security services believed Teitel acted alone, and not as part of a larger settler terrorist organization. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's November 25 decision to temporarily freeze settlement construction in the West Bank has the potential to incite further incidents of settler violence and terrorism. On December 11, a mosque in the West Bank village of Yasuf was set afire, apparently in response to the moratorium. Settlers repeatedly clashed with IDF and border security forces following Netanyahu's decision. Israeli media outlets reported on a leaked IDF plan to put down settler violence and enforce the settlement freeze, further contributing to the combustible mixture.

Terror Finance

Hamas and Hizballah continued to finance their terrorist activities against Israel primarily through state sponsors of terrorism Iran and Syria, and fundraising networks in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, and to a lesser extent, elsewhere. Israel has adopted strong measures to prevent the financing of terrorism through its financial sector. Among other objectives, its policy of restricting economic activity with the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip has sought to reduce inflows of funds to support terrorist activity there. Regulation and enforcement of Israel's domestic financial industry is equivalent in scope and effect to other highly industrialized and developed nations. In 2009, several changes strengthened Israel's anti-money laundering and combating of terrorism financing (AML/CT) legislation, and significantly increased the number of reported seizures related to financial crime by the Israeli National Police (INP).

Law Enforcement Front

On the law enforcement front, the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) and INP continued to cooperate with U.S. law enforcement agencies on cases involving U.S. citizens killed in terrorist attacks. On December 7, the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) passed a controversial biometrics bill. The law will not officially go into effect until the Ministry of Interior signs implementation regulations. Once the law goes into effect, Israeli citizens can volunteer to participate in the program for a two-year trial period. Israel will reassess the law following the trial period to determine if the law will be extended. The law seeks to create a biometric database containing fingerprints and facial scans; corresponding biometric chips will be installed in Israeli identification cards and passports.

Speculation continued regarding the potential release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who has been held captive by Hamas since June 25, 2006. Israeli society remains divided regarding the prisoner exchange. The majority believe the state has a moral obligation to do everything in its power to obtain the release of Shalit. However, a strong minority argues Israel should not capitulate to terrorist organizations' demands and questions the price of the exchange -- especially if Palestinian terrorists with "blood on their hands" are released as a result.

Israel security services spent more time, attention, and resources focused on cyber terrorism. IDF leadership stressed the importance of creating a "cyber command" to combat cyber threats. Israel security officials highlighted new trends in terrorist activity on the Internet beyond collecting information posted by Israelis. These included direct and concrete appeals and proposals to Israeli citizens, especially those active in social networks, to become involved in terrorist activity or pass along classified information in exchange for payment. Concerns over such activity included divulging classified information, as well as luring Israel citizens abroad with the promise of payment so that terrorist organizations can abduct them. Israel security officials called on Israeli citizens to be alert to suspicious internet or telephone appeals by unfamiliar persons.

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